

Information Please Publishing, Inc.

Theodore B. Dolmatch  
President

February 5, 1979

Dr. Joshua Lederberg  
President  
Rockefeller University  
1230 York Avenue  
New York, New York 10021

Dear Dr. Lederberg:

You may recall writing me on February 9, 1978, in response to my letter asking if you would consider doing a short article for the 1979 INFORMATION PLEASE ALMANAC. You suggested that I write you again this year. I am now doing so to ask whether you are now able to contribute to our 1980 edition.

You may remember that Dr. Baruch Blumberg prepared a short survey of "The Year in Medicine" and that Father Theodore Hesburgh contributed "The Year in Religion" to the 1978 edition. For the 1979 edition, which you should have received some time ago, Dr. Hans Selye did an article on stress and Dr. Billy Graham contributed his comments on important events in the year in religion.

As I mentioned last year, these authorities contribute to INFORMATION PLEASE because they agree that it is important to give our hundreds of thousands of readers authoritative commentaries on things that really matter.

As the editor of an almanac, I'm very much aware that books like ours often simply produce a melange of the important and trivial, without discriminating between them. We are at least as ready as journalists are to presume that what is called news is also history. I have been trying at INFORMATION PLEASE to change the way we approach this problem -- hence the contributions from people very much like yourself -- as well as the changes we've made in such traditional sections as our "Headline History." One reviewer comments on how well we've achieved our goals in the enclosed. I'm obviously trying to deal with ideas that will be consequential for years to come and to spend as little space as possible on "trivia."

There are a few people in every discipline whose knowledge and perceptions of what is important are simply more valid than almost anyone else's -- people like you, who have themselves created something lasting.

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I'd like to expose my very middle-of-the-road readers to such people. Therefore, I hope you might be willing to identify certain ideas that you feel are important and that should be perceived as important by the public generally. The 1980 INFORMATION PLEASE ALMANAC gives us a useful -- if artificial-- "once-in-a-decade" chance to review the past ten years or to look ahead to the next decade.

Would it be possible for you to do a short article for the 1980 edition of INFORMATION PLEASE on what you feel to be the most significant developments in a field in which you are specifically interested? Given the breadth of your interests, I am reluctant to suggest that you limit your comments to a discussion of genetics; I would be very pleased to have you go further afield if you wished to do so.

Although we offer a modest honorarium for this work, it cannot of course be the motivation for your contribution. Rather I hope you'll agree with me that such an article is a responsibility for both of us -- for the Almanac as a popular reference book and for you as a person uniquely qualified to inform the public.

I am therefore asking you the same question that I asked a year ago. Since my request then coincided with your appointment at Rockefeller, it caught you at a very busy time. I can only hope that now -- as busy as you are -- you'll find the time to write a short piece for us.

If you would be willing to provide a short article, I'll be very pleased to provide you with our very simple requirements and to go into whatever detail you may need.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Joshua Lederberg", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

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